

much to our community and our state.●

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

● Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, September 1, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,559,258,503,320.20 (Five trillion, five hundred fifty-nine billion, two hundred fifty-eight million, five hundred three thousand, three hundred twenty dollars and twenty cents).

Five years ago, September 1, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,398,851,000,000 (Four trillion, three hundred ninety-eight billion, eight hundred fifty-one million).

Ten years ago, September 1, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,603,539,000,000 (Two trillion, six hundred three billion, five hundred thirty-nine million).

Fifteen years ago, September 1, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,362,606,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred sixty-two billion, six hundred six million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,196,652,503,320.20 (Four trillion, one hundred ninety-six billion, six hundred fifty-two million, five hundred three thousand, three hundred twenty dollars and twenty cents) during the past 15 years.●

#### EXPLANATION OF MISSED VOTE

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, this afternoon I was not present for a vote to table the McCain Amendment No. 3500. Had I been present, I would have voted against the tabling motion. I was absent because I was presenting, posthumously, Mother Theresa's Congressional Gold Medal, which is just now available. The replicas are available from the U.S. Mint. It was a tremendous tribute to a wonderful lady, Mother Theresa, who passed away a year ago September 5, as we remembered her today. My vote would not have changed the outcome of the vote on this motion.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. STEVENS. Reserving the right to object, I am trying to get another appropriations bill up, so I would like to not have the floor get under the control of some other problem here.

I do not object.

#### TRIBUTE TO STROM THURMOND

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I wish to join my colleagues today in commending our dear friend from South Carolina for achieving the significant

mark of having voted on 15,000 occasions as a Member of the Senate. He has been a wonderful friend to me; he was a great friend of my father's, who served with him in this body. I know there have been many kind things said about him today. I just want to add my voice to those accolades. What a great joy it is to serve with this remarkable American. I did not want the day to end without offering my words of congratulations to this fine young man from South Carolina.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. JEFFORDS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. JEFFORDS. I ask unanimous consent I may proceed as if in morning business for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is already in morning business, with the 10 minute limitation. The Senator is recognized.

#### PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a Member of my staff, Hilary Hoffman, be granted floor privileges for the rest of the day's session of the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SUPPORT OF U.S. RATIFICATION OF THE U.N. CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I would like to direct my colleagues' attention to report language accompanying this legislation supporting U.S. ratification of an important treaty—the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification, also known as the "Drylands" Convention.

The term desertification is often misassociated with the expansion of deserts. Rather, it is the loss of soil fertility in dryland agricultural areas. Most of the world's basic food crops are grown in dryland areas. Poverty, population pressure and unwise government policies often drive farmers to use unsustainable farming practices on marginal lands just to survive. Over time, desertification deepens poverty. It undercuts economic growth and triggers social instability in poor countries lacking resources to combat it.

The American Dust Bowl of the 1930's is a prime example of desertification. The hunger, poverty and migration spawned by the Dust Bowl left an indelible mark on our national psyche. In 1939, John Steinbeck depicted the tragedy so well in his great American novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*:

And then the dispossessed were drawn west—from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas, families, tribes, dusted out, tracted out. Car-loads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless—restless as ants, scurrying to find

work to do—to lift to push, to pull, to pick, to cut—anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land.

Every student of U.S. history studies the economic and social impact of the Dust Bowl. U.S. history textbooks feature photos similar to these behind me.

Our national response to this disaster was a successful community-based soil and water conservation effort that is still fighting the threat of desertification in areas of the American West today. While we have grappled with this problem and won, the rest of the world is not so fortunate. Imagine our own Dust Bowl if we did not have the technological know-how or the economic resources to deal with it?

The risk of new dust bowls is increasing at an accelerating rate in over ninety developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Billions of tons of topsoil are washed or blown away every year.

The U.S. is feeling the fallout from desertification abroad. Thousands migrate over our borders from land-degraded countries such as Mexico. We spend millions on humanitarian aid for drought-affected countries in Africa. Desertification leads to even more costly and frequent food aid programs. Dwindling land and water resources frequently ignite regional conflict. Desertification abroad will also continue to pose risks to our environmental health and contribute to the loss of plant and animal species which may hold the keys to future sources of food and medicine.

To address the problem, in 1994, the United States participated in negotiating the Drylands Convention. By the time negotiations began, developed nations were weary of carrying huge loads in support of environmental treaties. U.S. negotiators insisted that no new responsibilities be placed on our government. The result is that this treaty is the first of its kind.

It does not establish a big, new U.N. program. No army of U.N. employees will be deployed to fight desertification. The treaty uses a bottom-up approach where the solutions are devised and then carried out by people at the local community level. National action plans required of all donee states by the treaty will add greater cohesion and coordination to existing efforts.

The treaty's financial mechanism is unique as well. No new U.S. foreign aid funding is required under the Convention. The U.S. currently contributes roughly \$30 million per year to fight desertification. So why do we need the treaty? Because it gives U.S. foreign aid dollars "more bang for the buck." Existing U.S. foreign aid resources would be used more efficiently by better matching of donors with areas of need through the establishment of a Global Mechanism. It does NOT impose any international mandates on U.S. funding.